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Promotions and Appointments

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You Can Go Home Again: Dr. Gus Aguirre Returns to Penn

By Susan L. Finkelstein

A couple of unpacked cardboard boxes placed neatly atop a filing cabinet are the only indication that Gustavo Aguirre, V’68, GR’75, professor of medical genetics and ophthalmology, returned to the Ryan Hospital just this July, after a 12-year stint at Cornell. Other than the boxes, the second-floor office appears never to have been inhabited by anyone else: framed covers of journals featuring Dr. Aguirre’s work adorn the walls, as do as artistic renderings of boxes, the second-floor office appears never to have been inhabited by anyone else: framed covers of journals featuring Dr. Aguirre’s work:

Lancelot, the Briard mix whose sight was restored.

Dr. Aguirre’s research focuses on inherited diseases of the eye, especially degeneration of the retina in dogs, humans, and other mammals. In 2001, he, his colleagues at Cornell’s James A. Baker Institute for Animal Health, and researchers at Penn were the first to restore vision in blind dogs using gene therapy:

Class of 2008 Profile

The Class of 2008 arrived on campus for orientation at the end of August. Eighty-seven women and 21 men, ranging in age from 21 to 48 years, with a mean GPA of 3.54, are already hard at work, coping with the heavy coursework. The majority of the students, 64 percent, are from Pennsylvania, the balance are from New Jersey (8), Massachusetts (7), New York (5), Connecticut, Illinois and Virginia (3 each), international (2, Bermuda and Japan), and one each from Colorado, District of Columbia, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, and Oregon. The School received 1,217 applications and made offers to 154 applicants.

The majority of the students under-graduate degrees is a BS (64); a BA was earned by 43 and BFA by one. Five students have an MS, two an MA, and one an MLAS. Eight students received their undergraduate degrees from Penn and Cornell. In all, 62 undergraduate schools are represented in this class with 35.2 percent of the students having attended top-tier (most competitive) schools, 24.1 percent second-tier (highly competitive) schools, and 21.3 percent third-tier (very competitive) schools.

“Lancelot,” a four-year-old briard mix since birth, was the first creature ever to recover sight thanks to this revolutionary work, which also holds promise for curing a similar disease in children, Leber congenital amaurosis. In gratitude,

Given the growing attention garnered by gene therapy and the entirely new methods of treating disease it is generating, the return of Gus Aguirre to Penn has been quite a coup for the School. And the benefits are mutual: “It was great coming back to Philadelphia; my family still lives in the area,” says Dr. Aguirre— in fact, one of his sons, Dr. Geoffrey Aguirre, GR’98, M’00, is an assistant professor in the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience at Penn Medicine. The two Aguirres are collaborating on a project studying the brains of dogs before and after gene therapy restored their vision.

Now, if only those last parts for Dr. Aguirre’s fluorescent microscope would arrive....

Promotions and appointments

Effective July 1, a number of faculty members were promoted:

Dr. Charles H. Vite to assistant professor of neurology; Dr. Anna S. Kashina to assistant professor of biochemistry; Dr. Amy Kapatkin to associate professor of surgery; Dr. Karen L. Rosenthal to assistant professor of special species medicine and surgery; Dr. Gabriela S. Seiler to assistant professor of radiology; Chick Weisse, V’98, to assistant professor of surgery; Dr. Wilfried Mai to assistant professor of pathology; Dr. Andreas Komaromy to assistant professor of ophthalmology; Drs. Danian Gu, Petra Werner, and Barbara Zangerl to research assistant professors of medical genetics; and Dr. Robert Poppenga to professor of toxicology.